

NEWS ARTICLE: 3.28.2003

APRIL IS CHILD ABUSE MONTH

My love and support of children is widely known within my district. Many of my constituents recognize my specialty license plate "4THEM," or comment on one of the dozens of "Kidpins" I wear. Both of these programs raise funds for the Children's Trust Fund (CTF), the only statewide, non-profit organization in Michigan solely dedicated to the prevention of child abuse and neglect. Prior to 2001, there was a check-off on the Michigan Income Tax Fund that enabled tax payers to contribute part of their tax refunds to the CTF. Since 1982, the CTF has raised over \$60 million and provided support for over 6 million children and their families.

Since its inception, the Children's Trust Fund and its 69 local councils across the state have been working tirelessly to prevent child abuse and neglect through outreach, education, research, public awareness and advocacy. And every year, Michigan designates April as Child Abuse Prevention Month in an effort to further public awareness of this tremendous problem because child abuse and neglect continues to be a significant problem in our state, as well as the entire country. More than 350 cases of child abuse and neglect are reported each day in Michigan. Nationally, nearly 1 million children suffer from abuse annually based on actual reported cases; the number is likely much higher.

Child abuse has no barriers...it occurs at every socioeconomic level and in every race. Victimization rates are similar for male and female victims except for victims of sexual abuse. More than 80% of victims are abused by one or both parents. Mothers acting alone are responsible for about 47% of neglect victims and 32% of physical abuse victims. The youngest children are the most vulnerable. Shaken baby syndrome is a specific form of child abuse and the leading cause of death in child abuse cases in the United States. Most incidents last just 5 to 20 seconds, but that is enough time to cause sufficient brain damage to kill a baby.

There are actually four types of abuse: physical, sexual, emotional, and physical neglect. Children who witness abuse but are not victims themselves often exhibit some of the same life-long affects of the abused, such as anxiety, depression, juvenile delinquency, substance abuse, adult criminality, etc. Victims also tend to repeat the pattern and become abusers themselves in their adult years.

And this abuse does not come without a price tag – analysts estimate that child maltreatment and inadequate parental care cost the state approximately \$823 million annually. Of that, only about \$5 million goes to treat the actual injuries due to abuse; psychological care costs another \$16 million. Another \$74 million is paid for foster care. Adult criminality associated with child abuse and neglect is estimated to be \$175 million

and the juvenile justice system spends over \$200 million for services to abused and neglected kids. Prevention of abuse will save the taxpayers of this state. A recent study concluded that providing support and education for every Michigan family expecting its first child at a per-family cost of \$712 with a total estimated annual cost of \$43 million could greatly reduce the state's cost associated with child maltreatment and neglect. Research has proven that for every \$1 spent on prevention, \$19 is saved in crisis-oriented programming such as foster care, protective services and special education.

If you care about kids, and preventing child abuse and neglect, I invite you to join in supporting the Children's Trust Fund. You can purchase a "Kidpin", each one comes on a card with a story about an actual child that has benefited from services of the CTF that can easily bring tears to the eyes of even the most stoic. You can put a "Children" specialty license plate on your vehicle – the proceeds from this plate are transferred from the Secretary of State to the CTF. Or, you might choose to participate in the upcoming "Cherish the Children" Fantasy Auction which will include fantasy trips, sporting events and much more. For more details on any of these ways to help – go to www.michiganchildrenstrustfund.org.

By Senator Bev Hammerstrom
17th District